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ABSTRACT

The discipline of educational psychology can contribute to a liberal education and should be reorganized to meet this new role in higher education. In light of such problems as the decreasing demand for teachers, educational psychology courses should change from a teacher education to an elective or liberal arts orientation. Economic conditions and the high cost of education are pushing students prematurely toward a narrow vocationalism or professionalism. However, the university is still more than a training institute for it offers the opportunity for personal development. Definitions of liberal arts education suggest that its role is to present students with all the questions mankind has ever raised and tried to resolve. Because the discipline of educational psychology considers how human beings develop and learn, it is appropriate to include it in a liberal arts course of study. Data on undergraduate enrollment in the author's educational psychology course show that between 1968 and 1977 12% fewer students are taking it specifically for teacher certification. Instead, they are taking it as an elective in an area of nonprofessional interest. Unless more educational psychologists redesign their course focus, the discipline may perish. (Author/AV)

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Educational Psychology As A Liberal Art

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My thesis is simple... the discipline of educational psychology can contribute to a liberal education. We should capitalize on this potential as we organize and teach the undergraduate course in educational psychology. Some of us, not yet awakened from the deep sleep commonly known as the doctoral program, may continue to think that educational psychology is the exclusive domains of research inquiry and teacher education. That view is, I believe, myopic and on a collision course with survival. Let me build the case with the following general scenario.

A somewhat less than happy set of circumstances is impacting on institutions of higher education. The problems have come about as a result of the confluence of a number of different themes that have gathered momentum in the recent past. The emergence of a slow/no growth economy, an environmental-social ethos characterized by a shift from the "psychology of more" to the "psychology of enough," population imbalances brought about by the post war baby boom leading to a surplus of college graduates in relation to the number of jobs requiring college-trained skills, an increasing job-orientation motivation for college attendance among students... the list seems endless; together, in combination and in varying degrees, these developments are clearly antithetical to the programs of many colleges and universities.

In society at large we can brace ourselves for this impending collision and minimize its impact by rethinking the basic concepts of work, unemployment,

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underemployment, etc.. In higher education institutions it would seem to behoove all units and subunits to identify new roles, to reorganize programs to meet these new roles, and to re-examine the promotional emphasis on the value of higher education. Already the economic-benefit arguments for a college education are being called into question. There seems to be a slight but growing re-emphasis on the educated-person/self-growth motivation for college attendance. Programs aimed at the preparation of elementary and secondary school teachers are particularly vulnerable to the impact of the aforementioned unhappy set of circumstances. One of the dumb certainties of existence in an otherwise uncertain world is that there are far too many teachers for far too few teaching positions (Klees, 1975). Educational Psychologists who direct their energies exclusively toward the preparation of teachers find themselves in an uncomfortable position... they are supplying a product for which there is a decreasing demand. The admonition to seek new directions and identify new roles is critical for educational psychologists. While the persuasiveness of the perceptual shift of the undergraduate educational psychology course to a liberal arts perspective is problematic, I believe that such a view is consistent with the renewed emphasis on the "educated-person/self-growth motivation" for college attendance and not inconsistent with the job-orientation motivation.

Surely the conditions of the economy and the high cost of education have pushed students prematurely toward a narrow vocationalism and/or professionalism. Too many people see vocational/professional training to be the objective of a college education. These people define the liberal arts graduate as "unskilled labor" in the employment market. But the university is not, or at least is more than, a training institute. It offers the opportunity for personal development, not the fulfillment of a predetermined role. Those of us who share the view that the university is not merely in the business of training minds for employment will applaud the suggestion that educational psychology has a contribution to make to a liberal college education; those who don't, won't.

Last year in this forum, Schwartz (1977) stressed an expanding role for educational psychology. She emphasized interdisciplinary collaboration and a broadened range of practice for the educational psychologist. Similarly, Snelbecker (1977) commented favorably on the contrasting views of "appropriate functions and contributions of educational psychologists." He advocated the architectural function of educational psychologists as bridge builders between researchers/theorists concerned with new knowledge production and the applied educational psychologist. According to his proposal this middle group of architectural educational psychologists would be concerned with knowledge utilization.

We have already heard, in this symposium, of an expanded role for educational psychologists in parent education, in the allied health professions, and (along lines consistent with the increasingly fashionable performance-based teacher certification movement) teacher education. All of these uses of educational psychology (as represented in the undergraduate course) are to be applauded. Educational psychology emerged and grew as a discipline, as an applied field, in a teacher education context. But as developments in the field progress and as the needs of society change, so the traditional undergraduate course in educational psychology needs re-examination in terms of these emerging trends or it will go the way of the dinosaur.

I have argued elsewhere (Ripple, 1971) for expanding and broadening the base of the course; for releasing it from being the exclusive domain of teacher education. For all of the merits of those arguments, and of the excellent proposals others have made subsequently, I am convinced that they do not exhaust the possibilities of function for the undergraduate course. My own view of a new vision and mission for the course is even broader; perhaps so broad as to be diffuse. Not only are we no longer the exclusive domain of

a teacher education orientation, I believe it is shortsighted for us to consider ourselves restricted to training in the helping professions at large (parents, teachers, nurses, counselors, extension agents, community health workers, etc.). Hence, the title of my paper, "Educational Psychology As A Liberal Art." The motivations for this view are manifold (my survival instincts, analysis of societal changes and needs, and the changing motivations across the years of students who enroll in my undergraduate course).

The idea of a liberal education has always been elusive. Without trying to capture this elusive idea once and for all, the most succinct and attractive definitions I have encountered are the ones by Emerson and by Perry. Emerson makes the distinction between teaching students to "aspire to be such men as we are" and teaching them to "aspire to be all they can." Perhaps even better is the offering by Perry (1970)... "The function of the liberal college education is to present to the student, in a concentrated form, all the questions which the sophomore in man has ever raised and which mankind has spent the rest of its history trying to resolve and live with." Essentially my argument is that educational psychology has become one of the principal intellectual themes that have shaped and given substance to contemporary civilization. It does this through the substance of its inquiry into how human beings develop and learn.

In a sense, there is no such thing as a liberal art or general education course. A course must be judged to meet the criteria of a liberal arts course not on the basis of the material it presents or the level of technical sophistication with which it engages the subject, but rather on the student's background and motivation for enrollment. Given a particular student, any course might serve to meet the criteria; a narrowly focused and highly technical biology course, for example, if it were taken by someone on his/her way to law school. One could argue effectively that however educated students might be

when they enter the university, the faculty are, by and large, better educated. This seems to me to be an important distinction, without which collegiate education would make little sense. For example, when I (and most students) entered college not only had I not studied but I had never heard of enzyme chemistry, Freudian psychoanalysis, cultural anthropology, concepts of intelligence, economic theory, the taxonomy of educational objectives, the second law of thermodynamics, comparative linguistics, retention and transfer, Dostoevsky, educational psychology, and most music composed before the time of Glenn Miller! Had I been pushed by economic circumstances into a premature narrow professionalism/vocationalism, I would not have studied many of these subjects. I think many students a few years ago, and perhaps today, were/are being so pushed. I think, also, that this is changing and that the change augurs well for the undergraduate course in educational psychology.

How realistic is the proposal to perceive the undergraduate course in educational psychology as a liberal art? In different institutions the response to that question will vary. However, aside from specific institutional peculiarities, I believe the notion of studying educational psychology as a liberal art has much merit as an attractive alternative in the face of a dwindling teacher education constituency. I would like to respond for my course at Cornell University by sharing with you a picture of the enrollment changes (in terms of student motivation for taking the course) from 1968 through 1977.

Table 1 Here

If you will assume, with me, that the "electives" (non-professional interest) motivationally fit my criterion for judging the liberal arts orientation of the course, then the data support a positive response to the question of a "realistic

perception." However undramatically, the motivations of the target population for the course are shifting from a teacher education to an elective (read "liberal arts") orientation. Moreover, an undetermined number of students in the teacher education column are taking the course because they "might" want to teach. These students are taking the course "just in case" and to help them make up their minds. It could be argued, therefore, that the readily discernible shift is even greater than it seems.

And so... we end at the beginning. My argument suggests few changes in the course itself... perhaps a de-emphasis on schools and teacher education in the examples we use, a more broadly based mind-set as we select and organize the content of educational psychology for presentation in course outlines and syllabi or delivery in lecture, seminar, and discussion. Certainly there are implications for textbook writers who devote their treatment of educational psychology exclusively to the preparation of teachers, but I'll let them sort that out. There are enough textbooks currently published to provide ample choice for professors and students. Consistent with the individualization of instruction and the accomodation of differing student entry motivations, I let my students choose the text they want to use from a set of five that I preselect on the basis of differing orientations. I shall leave the issue of whether or not there ought to be separate educational psychology courses for prospective teachers and non-prospective teachers to wiser administrative heads than mine. I see no compelling reasons to separate the two, but others may differ.

In considering new directions for the undergraduate course in educational psychology we have moved from a narrow view of its teacher education service role, to one perceiving it to have humanistic relevance to a broader based student constituency preparing for one of the helping professions. I share with Samuels (1976, 1977) the apprehensions of a move toward a performance/

competence based course. However, currently fashionable such a move might seem, to succumb to it seems to me to demonstrate the survival instincts of a lemming. I hope, instead, you will seriously entertain, with me, the perception of educational psychology as a liberal art.

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Enrollment in Undergraduate Educational Psychology Course
Cornell University (1968-1977)*

	Student Motivation for Course Enrollment	
	% Teacher Education/Certification	% Elective/Non-professional Interest
1968	83%	17%
1969	81%	19%
1970	80%	20%
1971	80%	20%
1972	79%	21%
1973	77%	23%
1974	75%	25%
1975	73%	27%
1976	72%	28%
1977	71%	29%

*Total class enrollment ranges between 100-150 students enrolled from nine different colleges.

Average sex distribution: 60ZF, 40ZM

Class distribution: Frosh 1%
Soph 5%
Jr. 40%
Sr. 45%
Grad. 5%
Unclassified 4%